

Principal Examiner Report

October 2011

FS English Writing Level 1

E103

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General comments

This paper worked well in testing Level 1 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were:

1. Writing a letter to the council to give views about a planned park closure
2. Writing a message on an internet discussion forum, giving views on the subject of using mobile phones while driving

Both tasks were reasonably successfully interpreted; there were lots of prompts to draw on which enabled the learners to understand the tasks/contexts.

Task 1

This was a good task, enabling learners to suggest a series of valid reasons why the park should or should not be sold. Some learners showed considerable insight into the negative effects the selling of the park might have on the local community. There was a good range of responses and considerable differentiation.

Generally, the letters were relevant and written in an appropriate style and tone although there were some weak responses in terms of content. A higher proportion of learners managed to include the address we had given them, along with the sender's address, the date and the correct opening and closing. However, there were still quite a few learners who positioned the addresses incorrectly. There were also some learners who struggled with letter layout.

Strong responses followed the bullet point framework given in the rubric which gave structure to the letters. They were able to develop their ideas convincingly, establishing a reasonably coherent, clearly defined argument about whether or not the park should be sold. These responses contained an introduction, middle and an ending, and focussed on fewer issues that were well developed.

Form, communication, purpose

Strong answers contained the sender's address, the recipient's address and a date. They used the correct opening salutation of 'Dear Mrs Roberts', then opened the letter by explaining who they were and why they were writing. They gave a clear indication straight away about whether or not they agreed with the selling of the park and included valid, well thought out reasons for their views; these generally tended to be linked to the effects it would have on the different age groups and families in the local community. They also closed the letter well by adding that they hoped their views were of some value and they looked forward to reading more about the planned developments. Some even went so far as to say that even if

the park had to be sold, they hoped that another smaller park would be built elsewhere to compensate for the loss.

Spelling, punctuation, grammar

Strong answers used capitals for names and addresses correctly, had no comma splicing, used full stops and question marks (where appropriate) effectively and used the correct spellings of homophones. Sentences did not start with conjunctions and grammar and tenses were also used correctly.

Weaker responses

Weaker responses tended not to be able to make their minds up about whether or not selling the park was a good idea. They tended to state that the idea was "good and bad". Responses had nothing but a couple of sentences saying they did not like the idea and hoped the park would not be sold. There was little embellishment or development of the given information.

In terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar, weaker responses struggled with the tenses, particularly with auxiliary verbs, and there were the usual difficulties with upper case letters - particularly on "I" and after full stops. The main punctuation problem was commas on this task; some used them in place of full stops, others seemed to scatter them randomly and with no apparent plan.

Task 2

This turned out to be a very successful task, eliciting good responses from a large majority of learners. It was a very accessible, realistic task, which many learners could clearly relate to. This showed in the quality of responses. Learners generally found it relatively easy to structure answers to this question because of the informality of the 'blogging' format and personal experience. Inevitably, in some responses the contribution became a rant but generally, the learners dealt with the task fairly well. It allowed for some strong personal expressions of anger and simple recommendations for alternatives that did not endanger lives.

Stronger responses

Responses that fell into the top mark band were able to fully explain the reasons for their views and use the correct tone and language. They also put forward recommendations for alternatives to using a mobile phone while driving.

Form, communication, purpose

Strong responses adopted the correct tone, addressing Kat and Bill and acknowledging from the outset their contributions to the discussion. They stated whether or not they agreed with using mobile phones while driving and addressed the points Kat and Bill had made. They also put forward their own views and made recommendations for driving more safely, such as using 'hands free kits' and 'pulling over' if it was an emergency. They also had a succinct closing statement, eg 'in the end, you don't actually

need to use your phone when driving, just ignore it or switch it off, this will save lives’.

Spelling, punctuation, grammar

Strong answers showed consistent use of capital letters, especially for the names of those they were addressing in the internet forum, complete sentences, good subject verb agreement, good use of tenses and no comma splicing. They also got basic spellings correct.

Weaker responses

Weaker responses tended to just repeat what Kat and Bill had said and could not articulate their own views. Where they did put some of their own views forward, they did not explain the reasons behind these.

Recommendations for Centres

This is a Functional Skills test, so learners will only be rewarded for writing responses that are fit for purpose. In preparation for this test, learners need to understand the purpose of different types of functional tasks. When they come to the test they must read the task and stimulus text with great care to understand the purpose, before they start to write their response. Responses that are well written but of limited relevance to the task set will not receive a high mark for form, communication and purpose.

In preparation for this test, learners need to understand the purpose of different types of functional tasks (eg formal letter, informal contribution to an internet forum) and should be given opportunities to practise writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes. This experience will be of great help to them in tackling a future Level 1 Writing paper.

Centres should also reinforce the fact that 40% of the marks are for spelling, punctuation and grammar. It is important to remind learners that **they are allowed to use a dictionary** and also that they should spend a few minutes checking through their work, after they have finished.

Finally, it is also recommended that centres tell learners that they can plan their work on the exam paper. They will just need to rule through this if they don't want it to be marked.

Pass mark for E103 in October 2011

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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